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Hrvoje Čargonja: Bodies and Worlds Alive: an Outline of Phenomenology in Anthropology

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## BODIES AND WORLDS ALIVE: AN OUTLINE OF PHENOMENOLOGY IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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*The article begins with a short introduction to phenomenology with an emphasis on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose ideas have had a great impact on cultural anthropology since the 1980s, especially through notions like 'embodiment' and 'radical empiricism'. The article will proceed to outline main trends in phenomenological anthropology as well as its precursors. It then dedicates itself to some of the most prominent issues in anthropology in which phenomenology is particularly involved such as: 'bracketing', 'betweenness', 'mind-body dualism' and 'embodiment'. Alongside a summary of phenomenology's contribution to anthropology, the conclusions will address some of the critiques that are often directed at phenomenology.*

**Key words:** *phenomenology, anthropology, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, embodiment, mind-body dualism*

I would like to begin this article\* on phenomenology and anthropology by immediately posing the most evident question: What can a reflective and introspective science like phenomenology offer to cultural anthropology, a field that is by definition intersubjective?

Today, the prevailing consensus among cultural anthropologists is that knowledge about the ethnographic other is constructed intersubjectively, where intersubjectivity is conceived as dialogical, usually textual, discourse. Such epistemological ground anthropology reached through the history of dialogues between various approaches to cultural experience with all claiming or striving for the most comprehensive perspective. What phenomenology has to offer to this dialogue on intersubjectivity is an

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impetus to explore it beyond the constraints of language; to venture into areas of non-verbal communication and other physical ways of knowing and interaction. The example of mirror or empathic neurons demonstrates how scientific experiments can objectify 'irrationality' if it is accessed indirectly<sup>1</sup>. Considering the fact that phenomenology works on different epistemological grounds, phenomenology can offer such an indirect route that does not require complex technology but simply observation and reflection on how things appear to the consciousness when we encounter them in the world of our bodies and the world of other bodies and objects.

## INTRODUCTION TO PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is a philosophical discipline founded by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). Husserl thought of phenomenology as a radically different way of doing philosophy. He proposed studying whatever appears to the consciousness in the manner in which it appears, free from prejudice and preconceived attitudes inculcated in tradition or common sense (Moran 2000: 4–5). Phenomenology never evolved into a uniform system of ideas. Husserl's successors like Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others each had their own views on what phenomenology is and how it should be practised. However, the appeal to return to, or rather to begin with, the lived human experience in all its richness and devoid of distortive interpretations imposed by culture, seems to be more or less the common ground of all (ibid. 2–3). This is why phenomenology is best understood as a method rather than a philosophical system; a method that compels one to take into account the way events, things and problems appear to the consciousness (of the researcher or the people being researched) and that strives to suspend explanation before the phenomena are understood on their own terms. Returning to the things themselves as phenomenology's clarion call Merleau-Ponty (1962: ix) clarifies as follows:

“To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Gallese et al. 2004; Keysers & Perrett 2004; Preston & de Waal 2002.

relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: ix)

The suspension of ‘natural’ attitudes or assumptions that there is a world existing independently of our experience, Husserl named ‘bracketing’ or ‘*epoche*’. Bracketing is likened to the task of a jury which is called upon to consider only the evidence, not assumptions (Moran 2000: 11). Husserl claimed that the exercise of such procedure leads one to the attainment of a pure presupposition-less consciousness or transcendental ego devoid of prejudicial impediments. Rather than to offer causal explanations, the task of the phenomenologist is to document this process of bracketing and describe what is apprehended devoid of bias.

Intentionality or ‘aboutness’ is another characteristic of Husserlian phenomenology which states that consciousness is always consciousness of something (ibid.: 16). In other words, it means that the act of consciousness (*noesis*) and the object of consciousness (*noema*) are always intricately correlated. This bond, this intentionality, was for Husserl the ground of meaning and a way to transcend subject-object dualism (Husserl 1999: 86–93). Intentionality also led Husserl to realize that consciousness is completely engulfed by the environment. Husserl termed this immersion in the world ‘lifeworld’, and he saw it as given, prior to any objectification. Thus, lifeworld is one of the crucial concepts in Husserl’s phenomenology because it represents a direct critique of idealism and rationalism. Namely, these philosophical orientations suffer from a ‘view from nowhere’ perspective which disregards the fact that all experience happens in temporal flow, always from a certain perspective and always in relation to the surroundings (Husserl 1999: 353–356; Moran 2000: 12–13). Despite many opposing factions within the phenomenological movement and its numerous critics, it is here that the enduring value of phenomenology lies. It represents a continuous critique of naturalistic and positivist streams of thought that tend to neglect the irrefutable fact that all knowledge is immersed in and arises from lived and very much subjective experience (Moran 2000: 21). It continuously draws attention to the fact that objectivity is empirically constituted and should not be taken for granted.

In this connection, it should be pointed out that there are many critiques of Husserlian phenomenology. Thus, for example, Martin Heidegger criticized it for its lack of historicity, for metaphysical assumptions lurking behind the notion of transcendental ego, and for its failure to recognize that any description is already an act of interpretation constrained by the limitations of language itself (ibid. 20–21). This means that bracketing can never be quite conducted to the transcendental end Husserl envisioned. The phenomenological account, which is always a form of symbolic representation, is always influenced by contingencies of time and place. Other philosophical schools were also critical, including analytical philosophy that sees phenomenology as introspection and meaningless pseudo metaphysics. Marx also disliked phenomenology and saw it as “an apotheosis of bourgeois individualism” that disregarded intersubjectivity. Although Derrida considered himself a phenomenologist, his theory of deconstruction proved how meaning is not generated in the relationship between acts and objects of consciousness but in displacement, in *differance*.

All these positions point to the main presupposition that Husserlian phenomenology fails to bracket out because it is based upon it: that meaning and being (existence) can be separated and studied independently (Flood 1999: 99). This problem becomes particularly evident in phenomenological approaches to religion. Meaning in each religious system rests on the ontological assumption that Husserlian phenomenology tries to bracket out. As Flood (1999: 102) illustrates, phenomenology reaches its limits with statements like “To worship Śiva one must become Śiva”. Such śaivite utterance finds many correspondences across religious traditions. What is obvious from this example is that understanding such statements on their own terms, by denying the link between ontology and meaning, is impossible. We are in the end always left with two choices: either to assume an outsider, etic perspective based on ontological assumptions of western academic rationalism, or to embrace the insider, emic perspective that, although rational within its own cultural couching, becomes problematic when faced with western academic rationality. It is important to note here that neither of these rationalities constitutes a “value-free discourse” and that there are no truly ‘outsider’ views but only competing ‘insider’ ones” (Flood 1999: 104).

Any assumption in line with Husserlian transcendental consciousness is potentially theological and indeed very similar to the assumption of the

existence of God, Nirvana, or other, in a positivist sense, untenable religious 'natural' attitudes (Cox 2006: 214–215). Husserl's successors continued to deal with this problem of division between meaning and being. While hermeneutic strands in phenomenological thought, like that of Gadamer (2004) and Ricoeur (1981, 1990), sought to solve this problem in stressing dialogue, text and narrative, existentialist thought, particularly that of Sartre (1969) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), pointed out the role of the body as the ground where meaning and existence coalesce. For Merleau-Ponty, as we shall see further on, meaning and being are interconnected on the level of experience, which is not necessarily objectified. *Apriori* knowledge, non-verbal and unconscious communication and other non-conceptualized bodily ways of knowing comprise a far greater proportion of human daily life and experience than narrative and verbal dialogue do (Csordas 1990: 6). The fact that intersubjectivity is not only discursive is particularly well evidenced by recent anthropological studies of interspecies communication that is almost completely non-conceptual (e.g. Blackman 2008: 8).

All this is why Heideggerian and existentialist streams of phenomenological thought, which stress the situatedness of human experience in the world, have been particularly popular with anthropologists. The thoughts of Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the role of the body in human perception have been especially influential. Consciousness and the world, meaning and being, are for Merleau-Ponty so intricately entangled through the medium of the body that one cannot talk about the one without talking about the other.

In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's influence is especially noticable in the work of anthropologists like Thomas Csordas (1990) who articulated one of the most influential concepts in anthropological theory of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 89) – embodiment<sup>2</sup>. The following section gives a brief overview of some of the crucial concepts of the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to notice that apart from Thomas Csordas whose work will be discussed later on in this article, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology also greatly influenced Michael Jackson and Paul Stoller, authors whose works are also considered milestones in phenomenological anthropology.

## THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

Maurice Merleau-Ponty developed much of his thought against two distinct streams of Western rational approaches to human experience and subjectivity: intellectualist and empiricist (Hammond et al. 1991: 127–152). The fundamental difference between these two theories of knowledge is in the ontological status of the world and the subject. For empiricist and realist thinkers, the world exists independently of our knowledge of it, whereas for intellectualist and idealist thinkers, the world is constituted by the knowing, transcendental subject. Reliable knowledge for the intellectualist is thus attained by reasoning, while for the empiricist it is exclusively gained by sense perception. Relying exclusively on sensory experience and denying *apriori* knowledge, the empiricist will give a causal explanation to what is perceived. The intellectualist, on the other hand, will take into account intuitive processes and try to reconstruct perception by referring to the exercise of the subject's cognitive powers (ibid. 131). Yet, as Merleau-Ponty notes, both intellectualism and empiricism see the world consisting of clearly identifiable objects and in this way suffer from the “‘prejudice’ of objective thought” (ibid., original quotations). As Merleau-Ponty states, “nothing is more difficult to know than precisely *what we see*” (1962: 51, original italics) because objects in the world as lived are often ambiguous and indeterminate and never fully specifiable or distinguishable. Merleau-Ponty's seminal work “The Phenomenology of Perception” (1962) abounds with examples that support his argument, such as: optical illusions, difficulty to distinguish colour and texture, perceiving smaller objects in the distance, etc. (Hammond et al. 1991: 183–187).

Generally speaking, Merleau-Ponty favours the intellectualist position because of the empiricists' complete disregard of subjectivity and *apriori* knowledge, insistence on the determinacy of sensation and their assumed constancy between sensation and perception, along with their inability to account for the unitary character of perceived objects and human freedom (Hammond et al. 1991: 142–144). However, the problem with intellectualism, as Merleau-Ponty points out, is its portrayal of perception as some kind of judgement in which the absolutely free subject is actively involved, whereby determinate objects of the world are known by the subject only as appearances distorted by the workings of the mind (ibid. 186). In this way, intellectualists misrepresent the process of perception and tend to

confound it with reflection and judgement. In opposition to the scientific or causal explanation of the empiricist and the analytical reconstruction of the intellectualist, Merleau-Ponty proposes phenomenological description (ibid. 130).

The advantages of the application of phenomenological description are particularly well seen when one tries to account for acquisition of skills, or for their application to new settings. Driving a new car with different steering controls or playing a new musical instrument does not require as much time as it did when we first learnt the skill. The way we accommodate our skills to different settings is not by deconstructing each particular movement that we have learnt and then reconstructing them anew with regard to new circumstance, as intellectualist explanations would have it (Hammond et al. 1991: 178–179). Usually, when driving a new car, we just get in and after some initial incongruence in our coordination, often followed by feedback from the machine, we adapt quite fast to the harder breaks, a bigger car, a smaller seat, the different position and size of the steering wheel and so on. What Merleau-Ponty makes clear through similar examples is that in order to move our limbs we do not have to first know the exact position of them (1962: 97; Moran 2000: 420). As Merleau-Ponty clarifies: “Habit has its abode neither in thought nor in the objective body, but in the body as mediator of a world” (1962: 128). In other words, there are bodily ways of making meaning, of knowing and of understanding the world that do not happen to us in the way objectified and codified knowledge does, or in Merleau-Ponty’s words: “My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my ‘symbolic’ or ‘objectifying function’” (ibid. 124, original quotation marks).

It is here that we come to Merleau-Ponty’s most important contribution to the existential-phenomenological project – the rehabilitation of the human body. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is “the vehicle of being-in-the-world” (1962: 71). The body is not just the physical and physiological, it is the “living body”, a field of perception and practice (1964: 16), a nexus between the world and self not parsed on subject and object while we are ‘being-in-the world’. This body has its inward (microscopic) and outward (macroscopic) horizons (1962: 271). The body can be apprehended in the form of instantaneous experience “peculiar to itself and complete in itself”



but also as generalized experience “in the light of an impersonal being” (ibid. 72). The body is also inseparable from the process of perception: “Appearances are always enveloped for me in a certain bodily attitude” (ibid. 271). This means that we perceive objects always with a certain kinaesthetic awareness of our body’s posture and its relationship towards its surroundings and circumstances. This is where Merleau-Ponty makes evident the error of Kant’s “reflective action”. Kant’s conclusion: “I am consciousness that embraces and constitutes the world” caused him to “overlook the phenomenon of the body and that of the thing” (ibid. 272). Furthermore, according to Merleau-Ponty, the trap of Cartesian *cogito* was not in a confusion of the transcendental and psychological, as Husserl thought, but in the inability to see that the body is the vehicle through which “we have the world and the means by which we sustain communications with it” (Schmidt 1985: 43). Thus, the world is not a universe of objective thought in which the body is seen as an object. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is the subject of action in-the-world or “body-subject” (Hammond et al. 1991: 151–152).

As the following excerpt demonstrates, experience, body and world are indivisible for Merleau-Ponty on the most basic existential level, and stand together as a unity:

“my experience breaks forth into things and transcends itself in them, because it always comes into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body...

...perceptual experiences hang together, are mutually motivating and implicatory; the perception of the world is simply an expansion of my field of presence without any outrunning of the latter’s essential structures, and the body remains in it but at no time becomes an object in it. The world is an open and indefinite unity in which I have my place...” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 272).

This directedness of consciousness toward the world through the medium of the body is what Merleau-Ponty’s understands as ‘intentionality’ (Hammond et al. 1991: 179–180). This is in line with the existentialists’ understanding of intentionality as “radical interdependence between the subject and the world” (ibid. 97). For Husserl, as noted above, intentionality



was conceived in quite an intellectualist way, as the relationship between acts and objects of consciousness that is the basis of meaning. For Merleau-Ponty, intentionality is not a cognitive but rather an incarnate and operative concept. Since the primary mode of being-in-the-world is practical (ibid. 151), intentionality for Merleau-Ponty does not just hold together consciousness and its object. It also brings together action and the situatedness of the body in the world. For Merleau-Ponty, intentionality is that which produces the meaningful unity of the world and life. It is given, integrated in life. Merleau-Ponty understands it as an “irreducible ontological relation with the world” (Moran 2000: 13). In this way, meaning as grounded in intentionality is not just derived through cognition but primarily through bodily movements and processes, which do not necessarily have to be cognized to be meaningful.

In much of his later work, particularly the unfinished “The Visible and the Invisible” (1968) and in his last published essay “Eye and Mind” (2007: 351), Merleau-Ponty continues further to dispense with Husserlian transcendental idealism by grounding his theory of incarnate consciousness on notions like reversibility, flesh and *écart*<sup>3</sup>. Merleau-Ponty argues for the fundamental dialectic in human embodied existence that always oscillates or reverses between two intertwined and interchangeable polarities across various sensory modalities: the sentient and the sensible, exemplified by the touching and the touched hand or the seeing and the visible body (1968: 136, 143). In terms of Gestalt psychology, which influenced Merleau-Ponty’s thought, we could say that reversibility reclines on the inherent ability to distinguish between the foreground and the background of our embodiment across various sensory modalities, where background is always the vantage point of the sensible. In terms of vision, this means that what we see as foreground can reverse into background. It means that background to whatever it is in the foreground represents a copresent vantage point from which our foregrounding is visible. This intertwining or chiasm between Hegelian in-itself and for-itself are present in any attempt to grasp things as they are (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 137; Schmidt 1985: 92). Reversibility stands for the equivocality of the two ways of perceiving, of objectifying

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<sup>3</sup> The term is usually translated as ‘gap, displacement’ (Csordas 2004: 171), ‘spread, divergence’ (Schmidt 1985: 95), ‘non-coincidence’ (Leder 1990: 89).

our being-in-the-world that are reflected in language as passive and active voices. For Merleau-Ponty it is the reversibility between these intertwined positions of embodiment that generates sense and meaning (Morris 2010). In this way, Merleau-Ponty's reversibility thesis is also an articulation of relativistic ontology based on chiasm. It is ontology that remains content with the interrogation of this intertwining, and does not require its distortive disentanglement or collapse. Since it strives to take into account the indeterminacy that intertwining implies, it curiously reminds one of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle from quantum physics. Merleau-Ponty's "metaphysics of contingency" (Moran 2000: 430) based on the notion of chiasm, assumes continuous and indeterminate reversibility between the perceiving and the perceived, or, to make further use of analogies from quantum physics, between 'velocity' and the 'mass'.

Therefore, just as we can never know simultaneously the mass and the momentum of the subatomic particle, so we can never become aware of the two chiasm's polarities at once. Between the sentient and the sensible there is always a gap (*écart*) of non-coincidence (Schmidt 1985: 95). A gap that opens up as preobjectified background against which any sensing and the sensed emerge as objectified positions. Merleau-Ponty uses the term 'flesh' for this "fundamental unity permeating all interrelated, interwoven things" (Cataldi 1993: 60). Being a term for which Merleau-Ponty finds no adequate counterpart in traditional philosophy (1968: 139), flesh is understood as an "elementary alterity" (Hass 2008: 31), an undifferentiated medium, an "elemental surface of sensibility" (Cataldi 1993: 3, 60–61) which encompasses both the depth of our bodies and the horizon of the world. Flesh is "the sensible in a two-fold sense of what one senses and what senses", where "the seer is caught up in what he sees" (ibid.: 139–140). From such a standpoint, perception is seen as the folding of the flesh onto itself whereby the flesh creates thickness in itself (ibid.: 152). This thickness is actually the distance that flesh creates through perception within itself. We consequently experience it as a subject-object dichotomy that stretches along opposing surfaces of the folded, thickened flesh (Cataldi 1993: 70; Merleau-Ponty 1968: 135).

Considering the fact that our corporeality is continuous with the flesh of the world which we inescapably share with others on an existential,

preobjectified level, reversibility, for Merleau-Ponty, is also the ground for intersubjectivity or perhaps better – intercorporeality (1968: 142). Our body possesses structural characteristics that enable this equivocation between touching and touched, between ‘within’ and ‘without’ (ibid. 134), ‘seeing’ and ‘suffering’ (Schmidt 1985: 93). Thus the ‘other’ is only a problem for rationalistic approaches, which try to disentangle the obverse and reverse modalities of our flesh. Intersubjectivity is ingrained in the elementary structure of the flesh, or in Merleau-Ponty’s words, “anonymous visibility inhabits both of us...in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh” (1968: 142).

By continuous insistence to reject *cogito* as a departing point of analysis, and to reveal hidden properties of human embodied existence which are fundamentally indeterminate, Merleau-Ponty is one of the few thinkers who seriously strived to grapple with both agency and structure (Schmidt 1985: 163). In this way, Merleau-Ponty anticipated many structuralist and poststructuralist ideas, which is why some authors place him between phenomenology and structuralism (Schmidt 1985)<sup>4</sup>. To conclude, for Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is the study of essences (1962: vii). However, such study is not conducted from the position of a voyeuristic ‘little man behind the eyes’ known as the transcendental *cogito* for whom “for-itself” always “flees” from the “in-itself” and vice versa (Schmidt 1985: 99). Rather, Merleau-Ponty posits incarnated essences that are grasped through consideration of the “facticity” of human existence, “for which the world is always already there... as an inalienable presence” (1962: vii), where the agency of the body-subject is grounded in the indeterminacy of inevitable yet enigmatic reversibility.

## PHENOMENOLOGY IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Phenomenological engagement in anthropology can be traced back to before anthropologists started more directly applying their readings of phenomenological philosophers. Thus, Victor Turner was very much

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<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, John Kultgen (1975) explores congruence between the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz.

influenced by the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey whose ideas, together with the pragmatist ideas of William James, in many ways informed Husserl's thought. Similarly, Clifford Geertz owes his culture-as-text paradigm to Paul Ricoeur, a hermeneutic-phenomenological philosopher of the Husserlian tradition. Apart from Turner and Geertz, there were earlier anthropologists who developed their own approaches to the psychological dimensions of the cultures they were studying. A good example is Irving Hallowell (1892–1974), one of the founders of psychological anthropology in the tradition of Franz Boas and Edward Sapir (LeVine 2010: 11–13; Throop & Murphy 2002: 199).

Hallowell's notion of the self endowed with perception and behaviour (i.e. practice) "in its culturally constituted behavioural environment" with "cosmic dimensions and implicit metaphysical principles" (Csordas 1990: 6; Hallowell 2010: 35, 40) populated with not just natural objects but also culturally constituted objects like supernatural beings (Hallowell 2010: 34–35) were important articulations because they strived to connect "perceptual processes with social constraints and cultural meanings" (Csordas 1990: 6). Csordas points out how Hallowell's theory, with its stress on perception and practice, bears some resemblance to Merleau-Ponty's thought. He explains how similarity is most likely due to the influences of Gestalt psychology that both Hallowell and Merleau-Ponty drew on. Furthermore, Csordas also notes how Hallowell's notion of the behavioural environment as "the context in which the practice is carried out" (Csordas 1990: 7) and his attempt to bridge behaviour and perception, stand in the line with anthropologists like Marcell Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu to whom we owe concepts like "techniques of the body" (Mauss 2007) and "habitus" (Bourdieu 1977: 78–87, 1984: 169–170). However, as Csordas (1990: 6) notes, Hallowell's conception of the self suffers from the intellectualist malady at which much of Merleau-Ponty's critique was directed. Hallowell's self is self-awareness, nothing other than transcendental *cogito*. This 'little man behind the eyes', although capable of grasping itself and becoming directed toward an objective and culturally constructed environment, is not a good model of reality because such a model neglects a very simple temporal observation: "while we are capable of becoming objects to ourselves, *in daily life this seldom occurs*" (ibid., *my italics*). Seen through the optics of such a theory, this means that there

is a 'dark matter' of subjectivity in social reality that makes up a higher proportion of our lives than objective and linguistic ones do. Although, as Katz and Csordas (2003: 277) point out, Hallowell even used the term phenomenology, his clinging to the "objective" cultural experience makes Hallowell an advocate of a "protophenomenological" trend in anthropology (Csordas 1994a: 6, 1997: 5–6). Along with Irving Hallowell, David Bidney (1973) and Lawrence Watson made similar attempts (1976). Robert Levy (1973) also deserves to be pointed out because of his seminal contribution to the anthropology of the preobjective experience (Throop 2005: 504–508).

Although during the climate of "writing culture" James Clifford does not mention phenomenology as an important trend in anthropology (Clifford & Marcus 1986), it was the "crisis of representation" (Fischer & Marcus 1999) in the anthropology of the 1980s and the 1990s that opened up the possibility for phenomenology to address less objectified, but very important and inevitable aspects of cultural reality (Katz & Csordas 2003: 277). Phenomenology was especially invoked by psychologically and medically oriented anthropologists. These anthropologists were becoming sensitive to the neglect of the body and subjectivity when dealing with less rational but inevitable aspects of cultural experience like pain, suffering, illness and healing (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 89). Such experiences are often portrayed as places of fragmentation, disjunction and discontinuity of human experience, difficult to objectify, convey and analyze (Kleinman et al. 1992: 7; Scarry 1985: 19, 29; Throop 2002: 13–15, 2003: 233–234, 2009: 541, 2010a: 6)<sup>5</sup>. In brief, anthropological imports from phenomenology consist of focus on the "life as lived" (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 92) in all of its indeterminacy and ambiguity; avoidance of excessively theoretical or ideological discourse and continuous endeavour to bracket prejudices and cultural attitudes; insistence on participation or "radical empiricism" (Michael Jackson 1989: 3; James 1912; Stoller 1989: 151); attention to "embodied, intersubjective and temporally informed engagements in the

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<sup>5</sup> See also: Coakley & Shelemay Kaufman 2007; Csordas 1997; Daniel 1994; Das 2007; Desjarlais 1994, 1996; Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good et al. 1994; Jean Jackson 1994a; Arthur Kleinman & Joan Kleinman 1996; Arthur Kleinman 1997; Arthur Kleinman et al. 1992, 1997; Mimica 1996; Scarry 1985; Trnka 2007, 2008.

world” (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 92). The passages ahead intend to give an overview of theoretical trends in anthropology.

In their recent comprehensive review of phenomenology in anthropology, Robert Desjarlais and Jason Throop (2011: 93) have delineated four general orientations of phenomenological thought in anthropology, not necessarily exclusive of each other: hermeneutic-phenomenological approaches, critical phenomenology, existential anthropology and cultural phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenological approaches<sup>6</sup>, heralded by Clifford Geertz’s “scientific phenomenology of culture”, seek to uncover “meaningful structure of experience” (1973: 364). They focus on discursive forces that govern anthropologists’ “interpretative efforts and intersubjective engagements” with the people they study (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 93). Critical phenomenological orientations in anthropology<sup>7</sup> are particularly concerned with the phenomenology of power and the historical conditions that shape lived experience. As represented by Michael Jackson, existential-phenomenological approaches in anthropology<sup>8</sup> are marked by radical empiricism and focus on the struggle with existential issues like the thrownness, finitude and uncertainties of the lifeworld. Cultural phenomenology, developed in the works of Thomas Csordas (1990, 1993, 1994a, 1997, 1999a, 2002, 2011) and grounded on the concept of embodiment, strives to account for both discursive and phenomenological aspects of a variety of topics like selfhood, healing, agency, pain, morality, music, learning, religion, etc.<sup>9</sup>

Another epistemological approach in anthropology that has been influenced by phenomenology is sensory anthropology (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 90–91; Bagarić 2011). Phenomenology’s tendency to question rational dualities, especially that of the mind-body divide, are particularly

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<sup>6</sup> Crapanzano 1985, 1992; Desjarlais 2003; Byron Good 1994a; Mattingly 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Biehl et al. 2007; Desjarlais 1997; Byron Good 1994a; Scheper-Hughes 1993; Willen 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Jackson 1989, 1998, 2005; Kapferer 1997; Arthur Kleinman 1999; Mimica 1996; Weiner 2003; Zigon 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Downey 2002; Geurts 2002, 2003; Groark 2011; Jean Jackson 1994a; Laderman & Roseman 1996; Low 1994; Ots 1990; Pinto 2008; Rabelo & Souza 2003; Straight 2007; Throop 2010a, 2010b; Wilson & Csordas 2003.

pertinent for the anthropology of the body. Sensory anthropology is another epistemological orientation very much concerned with varieties of perceptual processes and the “patterning of sense experience” across and within cultures (Howes 1991a: 3). Although prominent researchers in the field such as David Howes and Constance Classen have inclined to more intellectualist, comparative and historical perspectives in exploring the senses in society<sup>10</sup>, there are many sensory-minded anthropologists<sup>11</sup> influenced by phenomenology who have recognized the notion of sense as a relevant tool for attending to lived experience.

In anthropological discourse, any “concern with theorizing experience” is considered as phenomenological in orientation (Katz & Csordas 2003: 277; Throop 2003). Csordas termed such approaches in anthropology for which “experiential and phenomenological are in effect synonymous” and which do not directly engage with phenomenological literature ‘paraphenomenological’ (2003: 277). Following similar rationale, phenomenologically minded anthropologists have often called for stronger emphasis on researcher’s engagement in the field, on “radical empiricism” (Jackson 1989: 3; Stoller 1989: 151) and “participant sensing” (Pink 2009: 65). Following the optics of pragmatist philosophers like Dewey (1980) and James (1912) who see experience as a “radically empirical domain in which thoughts, feelings, and actions are inseparable” (Stoller 1989: 152–153), radical empiricist is sensitive to the ambiguity of experience in all of its thrownness, finitude and uncertainty (Jackson 1989: 3). This means that the researcher “is inclined to judge the value of an idea, not just against antecedent experiences or the logical standards of scientific inquiry but also against the practical, ethical, emotional, and aesthetic demands of life” (ibid. 13). In this regard, there are a number of anthropologists who returned from fieldwork with extraordinary experiences that defy Western rational explanations and testify to empirical involvement that not many researchers would be comfortable with (Favret-Saada 1980; Rosaldo 2007; Stoller & Olkes 1987; Young & Goulet 1994).

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<sup>10</sup> Classen 1993; Classen et al. 1994; Howes 1991b, 2003, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Geurts 2002; Ingold 2000; Pink 2009; Porcello et al. 2010; Seremetakis 1996; Stoller 1989.



## BRACKETING, BETWEENNESS AND ALTERITY

One does not have to know about phenomenology to practise it. Indeed, none better than the anthropologist knows what it really means to exercise bracketing in practice. Faced with the enveloping otherness of different culture, every anthropologist very soon realizes how important it is to suspend personal prejudices if one is to advance in understanding how people make sense out of their lives through discursive practices that researchers might find completely irrational or even appalling (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 88–89). Anthropologists are compelled to exercise bracketing due to the “betweenness” of their being-in-the-field (Crapanzano 2004: 5,6; Desjarlais 2003: 338), because of being “betwixt and between” cultures (Stoller 2009: 4; Victor Turner 1991: 95), neither here nor there (Geertz 1988) in liminal space maintained by the flood of cultural misunderstandings they face when trying to participate and observe, live and understand how other people make sense of their own experiences (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 89). Thus, for example, what stands behind Geertz’s notion of “experience-near concepts” (1983: 57–58) is actually a call to understand culture on its own terms by learning the “idiom of their minds” (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 19, 25) and then translating it (Barnard 2004: 160; Evans-Pritchard 1965: 109).

This, as Evans-Pritchard demonstrated, is achieved only by being mindful of native rationalities, of local ways of making sense out of experience. We have to suspend our rationalizing in order to gain access to the natural attitude of the other. Thus bracketing or Husserlian *epoche*, the touchstone of phenomenological method, is central for anthropological methodology as well (Desjarlais & Throop 2011: 88–89; Knibbe & Versteeg 2008: 49). Following Bidney (1973: 137), Throop discusses the notion of “ethnographic epoche” as a crucial element of ethnographic encounter that differs from phenomenological *epoche* “precisely because of its participatory and intersubjective underpinnings” (2012: 84; 2010a: 280–281)<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to mention another two thematic orientations in anthropology in which phenomenological method and *epoche* also took their roots. These are the anthropology of empathy (Briggs 2008; Gieser 2008; Groark 2008; Hollan & Throop 2008; Hollan 2008; Kirmayer 2008; Throop 2008a, 2010b) and the anthropology of morality (Geurts 2002; Arthur Kleinman 1999, 2006; Mattingly 2010; Throop 2010a; Zigon 2007, 2008).

Bracketing is something that, after all, everyone has to practise to a higher or lesser degree when non-dismissively attending to alterity. However, alterity is not just experienced as “encounter with other people(s), but as otherness in the sense of cultural difference that is alien, strange, uncanny” (Katz & Csordas 2003: 278). Building on Merleau-Ponty’s notion of reversibility and *écart* or displacement, Csordas talks about “embodied alterity” encountered on the level of the preobjective as the background that hovers around and behind everything that we attend to in the foreground of our consciousness (2004: 170–172). Thus for example, pain as an occasional or continuous experience always carries along the sense of “profound otherness” (Csordas 2004: 166), of “alien presence” (Leder 1990: 73) that is “world shattering” (Scarry 1985: 29). Pain resists objectification (Scarry 1985: 172; Throop 2009: 541, 2010a: 6) because on the most immediate level it relentlessly fails to fulfil the horizon of expectation and thus disrupts the coherence of our lived experience (Throop 2003: 234).

## **PAIN AND MIND-BODY DUALISM**

Among phenomenologically minded anthropologists, it is exactly the experience of pain that particularly stands out as a critique of intellectualist fallacy known as “ontologisation” of Descartes’ mind and body distinction (Csordas 1994b: 7). Pain poses a continuous challenge to Western biomedicine and similar approaches that entertain this mind-body divide in search for ‘objectivity’ (Kleinman et al. 1992: 5–6). Anthropological engagements with pain<sup>13</sup> show that when it comes to phenomena like chronic pain, social suffering, somatization, medicalization and similar, a human experience is revealed that exceeds the domain of the purely subjective. Lingering between the real and unreal (Jackson 1994b, 2011:

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<sup>13</sup> Anthropology has a rich body of phenomenological research on pain which is beyond the purview of this article. See: Das 2001; Desjarlais 1994, 1997; Garro 1994; Byron Good 1994a, 1994b; Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good et al. 1994; Jean E. Jackson 2005; Jean Jackson 1994a, 1994b, 1999, 2011; Jenkins 1994; Arthur Kleinman & Joan Kleinman 1996, 2007; Arthur Kleinman 1992, 1997; Arthur Kleinman et al. 1997; Low 1994; Ots 1990; Scarry 1985; Throop 2008b, 2010a; Trnka 2008.

383), between the physical and emotional (Jackson 1994a: 223), pain emerges as a very much embodied and intersubjective phenomenon (Good 1994b; Kleinman et al. 1992: 9), influenced (or even caused or alleviated) by culture and society. All this makes pain unexplainable by sole reference to a positivistic, biomedical conception of “the body as machine”.

It is no wonder then that the field of biomedicine is an especially good example of how one profoundly Western and important segment of our lifeworld can struggle with its Cartesian legacy, especially when it is applied to different cultures (Joralemon 1999: 73; Leslie 2001). Biomedicine owes much of its advancement to that moment in the history of Western rationalism when the body was freed from the dominance of Christian dogmatism and became the place of experiment (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987: 9). Despite the tremendous and impressive technological advancements in biomedicine that have made our lives so much easier, it is continuously faced with the problem of dysphoric states of embodiment, like pain, that do not necessarily have a physical cause. By focusing only on the body, on the physical, the mind is regarded as the place of the unreal, which is not quite what Descartes had in mind when he propounded his famous *cogito* (ibid.). This was one of the first critiques that medical anthropology offered to biomedicine. It is good in dealing with disease but not with illness (ibid. 10). By seeing the body as separate from the self (the mind), biomedicine reifies and fragments the body. Although such disregard of the “mindful body” (ibid. 30) has brought us benefits than no one can deny, the dominance of materialism in the practice of dealing with the not-altogether-materials like human subjects, especially when they belong to different cultures, is unfortunately a fertile ground for the dehumanizing treatments and disconcerting forms of body commodification exemplified by global organ trafficking.<sup>14</sup>

Even Descartes himself noticed how pain, along with other experiences like hunger and thirst, testifies to the close unity of mind and body (Leder 1990: 187 n. 11). However, as Leder points out, body-mind dualism is not altogether experientially unfounded. There are “bodily roots

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<sup>14</sup> For anthropological research dealing with these issues, see for example: Lock & Nguyen 2011: 248–251; Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987: 8–11; Scheper-Hughes 2000: 193–195; Sered & Taborj 1999; Sharp 2000: 298, 307.

of Cartesian dualism” (ibid. 7) that contain “hidden phenomenology” (ibid. 125). To put it otherwise, any exercise of mind-body dualism is also a form of experience and cannot be simply dismissed as incongruent with reality. Thus pain, according to Leder, disrupts our intentionality as orientation toward the world by causing “spatiotemporal constriction” that tends to pull us away from our forward directedness to the here and now (ibid. 73–75). To put it in Merleau-Ponty’s words, pain brings our awareness from the outward horizon of our being-in-the-world to the visceral depths of its inward horizon. It brings our body, or its parts and processes, to our consciousness as something foreign to ourselves, as objects that demand an “ongoing interpretative quest” (Leder 1990: 78). In this way, pain exerts “centripetal force” and “telic demand” upon our being-in-the-world (ibid. 76–77).

What is important to notice here, as both Leder and Csordas (1990: 6) point out, is that the body is “rarely a thematic object of our experience” (Leder 1990: 1). The body possesses “self-effacing transitivity” (ibid. 15), meaning that it has a tendency to remove itself, to recede or disappear from much of our lived experience into the background. To deploy Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility thesis, our experience of the body shifts between the body as an invisible part of the perceiver, and the body as visible and perceived. In that sense, pain and illness are experiences in which the *écart*, or non-coincidence, between the two ends of that chiasm is particularly well evidenced (ibid. 89).

To summarize, the problem with mind-body dualism lies not in acknowledging this quite experiential distinction, but in making out of it mind-over-body metaphysics. From the perspective of such metaphysics of presence, the body is seen as some pre-cultural, “raw biological material upon which the mind and culture operate” (Csordas 1994a: 8). Such an understanding of Descartes’ distinction in the form of positivistic objectivism still dominates much of Western academic rationalities, including social theory. By failing to acknowledge this irreducible ontological indeterminacy between *Körper* and *Leib*, between the physical and lived body, social theory has neglected the agency of the subject (Leder 1990: 5). The nomothetics of such an approach has a “natural attitude” that tends to see human beings as victims of external forces, as bodies in

movements enticed by powers of discourse. This ‘power from nowhere’ perspective can thus easily become ‘power from somewhere’, especially if such ‘models of’ reality are (ab)used as ‘models for’ reality by hegemonic individuals and groups seeking dominance over cultural others (Carrette 2007: 55–56; Leder 1990: 4).

Finally, equating soul with intellect in the spirit of materialism to which Descartes did not subscribe, Western academic discourse has appropriated the mind-body distinction as some sort of apotheosis of human cognitive powers. Such a perspective treats the body as *res extensa* and hence fails to see how awareness is more than just thinking. We are, not only because we think something, as Descartes would have it, but because we can [do] many other things with various degrees of presence, absence and thematisation of our bodies (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 121).

## **ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE BODY AND EMBODIMENT**

Anthropology’s encounter with the human body has resulted in a extensive literature with various theoretical orientations<sup>15</sup>. The most general distinction among body-centred works in anthropology seems to be also a chronological one. Anthropologists who have dealt with the body could be grouped according to the degree their publications are “revising biological essentialism and collapsing conceptual dualities” (Csordas 1999b: 180). Namely, earlier anthropological engagements with the body tended to see the body as an amorphous biological substrate upon which culture inscribes itself. Later approaches, particularly postmodern ones, and those under the influence of phenomenology, were more inclined to question this “natural attitude” of the body proper separated from mind and culture. They tended to see the body as the existential ground and site of human agency, intentionality and intersubjectivity (Csordas 1999b: 178–179; Farquhar & Lock 2007: 4–5; Lock 1993: 134).

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<sup>15</sup> A review that would do any justice to this extensive issue is beyond the scope of this article and can be found elsewhere; Asad 2000; Csordas 1999b; Farnell 1999; Featherstone 1995a; Frank 1995; Lock & Farquhar 2007; Lock 1993; Mascia-Lees 2011; Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987; Strathern 1996; Turner 1995; Wolputte 2004.

Although Marcel Mauss (2007 [1934]) and his concept of “techniques of the body” is generally considered as one of the most influential milestones in anthropology’s involvement with the body, it was not until the 1970s, that the body started to emerge as a distinct ethnographic theme. The theoretical underpinning for the development of what is often referred to as the anthropology of the body was first offered by Mary Douglas (2004) and John Blacking (1977). Following Durkheimian and Freudian paradigms, Douglas thought of the body as a “medium of expression” of the social, as a “natural symbol” through which human experience achieves cohesion (2004: 72, 91). She proposed a division into the physical and social body, a dyad very much haunted by Cartesian legacy. In this division, the mind, in Durkheimian fashion, is simply substituted by society while the physical body is still treated as an “unknowing inert object” (Howes 2003: 30; Jackson 1983a: 328–329). On the other hand, John Blacking in his book “The Anthropology of the Body”, appears to have been a little ahead of his time in rejecting mind-body separation and stressing the importance of attending to non-verbal communication (1977: 13–18).

Anthropology of the 1980s and 1990s was particularly marked by growing interest in the body. The roots of such interest could be found in the postmodern condition in which Western culture and social theory found themselves. Chris Shilling thus argues how the centrality of the body for the postmodern sense of identity is due to the “privatization of meaning”, where the body provides the only “firm foundation on which to reconstruct a reliable sense of self in the modern world” (2003: 1–2). Similarly, anthropologist Emily Martin explains the rising interest in the body with historical conditions that caused the “end of the body”, or in other words, “fundamental changes in how our bodies are organized and experienced” (1992: 121). Especially important in this regard are the technological extensions of our bodies that came with modernity. According to Donna Haraway, technology has already transformed our bodies into cybernetic or cyborg bodies (1991: 149–150). In the near future we may simply not be able to do without artificial organs or plastic surgery, let alone without our laptops and other gadgets.

After the 1970s, anthropologists exploring the body followed two distinct, though not necessarily exclusive orientations: representationalist

and phenomenological (Csordas 1999b: 186). Representationalist approaches to body<sup>16</sup> were very much under the influence of the linguistic turn in vogue at the time, as well as the works of Michel Foucault (1980, 1995, 2007) on discursive formations and technologies of power that inscribe, control, regulate and discipline the body. The culture-as-text paradigm was extremely beneficial for anthropology. It opened anthropology to history and methods of literary criticism, which consequently prompted a reflexive critique of ethnography. However, text has unfortunately proven to be a “hungry metaphor” threatening to ontologize itself and pull anthropological theory into the abyss of particularistic Derridean *difference* (Csordas 1999b: 182). In such a climate there was a tendency to even read the body as text (*ibid.*). As we have seen in previous sections, the notion of experience in these ‘writing culture years’ has become a term that “smacks of mystification” because all that the culture-as-text approach disclosed was representation, and the question of what representation stands for immediately became an essentialist ‘heresy’ (Clifford 1988: 35). As Csordas further notes, representation under such a paradigm does not only stand for experience but constitutes it (1999b: 183). By collapsing subject and object into text, symbolic and later dialogical and reflexive approaches in anthropology managed to deal with Cartesian dualism. However, they also tended to reduce experience to representation, which made the ethnographic gaze insensitive to non-representational aspects of human experience, which as was noted above, make up a far bigger proportion of human lives. As Jackson succinctly concludes, “the subjugation of the bodily to the semantic is empirically untenable” (1989: 122).

Although “the experimental moment in the human sciences” (Marcus & Fischer 1999) made many anthropologists realize that the task of the ethnographer is to evoke reality, rather than to represent it through signifiers, the reflexive turn that ensued could still not escape the confines of representational bias (Csordas 1999b: 185). The culture-as-text paradigm, just as the language upon which it is based, is only one of the ways of being-in-the-world (Csordas 1994a: 11). Rather than to consider language as the only way of knowing, as opposite to experience, as something

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<sup>16</sup> Comaroff 1985; Featherstone 1995b; Feldman 1991; Lutz 1990; Ong 1988; Pandolfi 1990; Seremetakis 1991; Suleiman 1986; Synnott 1993; Taussig 2009, 1993.



that fully refers to or constitutes experience, it seems that one is better off thinking about how language, as Heidegger (1996) asserts, *discloses* experience, or that we, as Ricoeur notes, *derive* meaning from language (1981: 141–142). More ‘bottom-up’ approaches were actually needed in the anthropology of the body that resonated with Merleau-Ponty’s articulations such as being-in-the-world, lived experience, intertwining, and the ‘flesh’. Hence, phenomenological approaches to the body in anthropology<sup>17</sup> not only considered it to be a theme of research and analysis, but also sought to develop a more probabilistic and dynamic theoretical framework that strives for a perspective on the body and the world in all of its immediacy and “mediacy” (Throop 2003: 233).

This leads us to the one of the most significant contributions that phenomenology has to offer to the anthropology of the body – the concept of embodiment. In anthropology, several scholars articulated such a non-dualistic approach to the body and mind, in which the body is not just regarded as an object but also as the site of agency<sup>18</sup>. In this sense, the concept of embodiment owes much to Merleau-Ponty’s view of the body as the “setting in relation to the world”, as a field of perception and practice where macroscopic and microscopic horizons of being-in-the-world converge (1962: 271–72). As mentioned in the previous section, Merleau-Ponty was very keen to consider both agency and structure, making his ideas conducive to a combination of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Schmidt 1985: 163). Thus for example, both Paul Stoller (1989) and Michael Jackson (1989) independently of each other enunciated their understanding of embodiment by combining Merleau-Ponty’s ideas with Dewey’s “radical empiricism”. On the other hand, Csordas’s own attempt was directed in wedding Merleau-Ponty’s existential indeterminacy of perception with Bourdieu’s logical indeterminacy of practice (Csordas 1997: 11–12). In this way, indeterminacy for Csordas, much like in Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility thesis, became the point of difference but also the point

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<sup>17</sup> Csordas 1994a, 1997, 2002; Desjarlais 1994; Jackson 1983a, 1983b; Laderman 1993; Low 1994; Ots 1990; Roseman 1991; Scarry 1985; Stoller & Olkes 1987; Strathern 1996; Throop 2010a; Turner 1994, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu 1977; Devisch 1985a, 1985b; Fernandez 1990; Jackson 1989; Stoller 1989; Strathern 1996; Turner 1995.

of synthesis between the semiotic and the phenomenological. By bringing 'being-in-the-world' and 'habitus' together, Csordas laid the groundwork of what he calls 'cultural phenomenology'. The non-dualistic methodological orientation of "dialectic structuralism" strives to include both discourse and phenomenology, existential and representational meanings, when addressing cultural phenomena (Csordas 1990: 12; 1999a: 147).

Furthermore, Csordas glosses over the distinction between body and embodiment by drawing on the analogy to Barthes' distinction between work and text (1977: 155–164), or rather, as Csordas following Hanks (1989) rephrases it, between text and textuality (1994b: 12, 1999a: 145, 1999b: 181–182, 2011: 137). The body, analogous to work or physical text (like the actual book copy) is thus a "biological, material entity" whereas textuality, analogous to embodiment, is understood as an "indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and by mode of presence and engagement in the world" (Csordas 1999a: 145). In the words of Merleau-Ponty, embodiment can be understood as a sort of intertwining, a chiasm between representation and being-in-the-world where "semiotics gives us textuality in order to understand representation [and] phenomenology gives us bodiliness in order to understand being-in-the-world" (ibid. 147). However, embodiment is also a methodological attitude, an attitude that directs the academic gaze to attend to bodiliness whether in text or experience, in others or in ourselves. In other words, embodiment is a call to attend *to* the body but also to attend *with* the body as well (ibid. 148–149, my italics).

Previous passages demonstrate how the body as a site for analysis was recognized by anthropologists of various theoretical orientations, representational and phenomenological alike. What phenomenology has to bring to this table is attention to "bodiliness", which in the words of Terence Turner consists of "animal and cultural aspects of the body, and beyond the body as a singular object, its relations with other bodies, its processes of formation and disintegration, objectification and deobjectification, and the construction of subjectivity and of intersubjective relations" (2011: 117). This means that no matter what ethnographic approach we feel comfortable with – critical, symbolic, reflexive, descriptive, phenomenological or nomothetical – we should pay attention to how we as researchers, or the

people that we study, attend to their bodies in a more systematic way than we did so far. The impetus to do so lies in the postmodern predicament that still seems to have a strong influence on popular and academic culture alike. Attention to body and bodiliness can, for example, be observed in a TV commercial in which a dog starts to bark and growl on hearing the sound of his owner's growling stomach, reminding the owner that it is time for a meal supplied by a certain brand of food. Similarly, it is also reflected in anthropological studies that show how today the purpose of exercise is not just to improve our looks, but to also to look good while we exercise (Bordo 2004: 182).

To recapitulate, in this section I have tried to give a brief overview of the role the body has played in the history of anthropological discourse. This development could perhaps be traced through three stages: the body as unknowing biological substrate, the body as text and/or dialogue, and the body as agent. To explain such a disappearance and appearance of the body in the humanities we could perhaps turn to Leder's notions of the absent and present body (1990) discussed in the previous section. From such a viewpoint, it seems that the enlightenment, rationality and general 'enmindement' of social science as the inheritor of Cartesian *cogito* enticed the body to recede from the humanities, just as the body recedes when we are individually engaged in more "minded" activities like thinking, imagining and remembering. In a similar way, postmodern scepticism invoked the body to reappear. The removal of firm referentials that came about through postmodern suspicion of any ontologising metanarratives, together with the technological interfaces, extensions, implants and procedures that our body are now subjected to, can be seen as certain existential pressures, as a state of distress or "crisis of representation" (Marcus & Fischer 1999: 8) that, just like illness and pain, cause the "presencing" of the body in our cultural and academic attending to the lifeworld (Leder 1990: 22-23). Understanding the body as the existential ground of culture, as something that our studies are *about* and something that we study *with*, calls for the inclusion of indeterminacy, or in other words, the human agency as an undeniable existential fact that leaves any theorizing without it always lacking.

## CONCLUSION

In this last section, I would first like to reiterate some of the main contributions of phenomenology to cultural anthropology alongside some of the numerous critiques directed at it. In a most general sense, phenomenology's main contribution to cultural anthropology has been to offer an expanded definition of culture by understanding it as 'lifeworld'. We are thrown into this world with boundaries delineated by our own living bodies; by their shape and functions and the limits of our perceptual and other cognitive functions, all of which are inextricably linked through patterns that extend throughout the world and bodies of other subjectivities. Therefore our bodies, objective or preobjective as Kirmayer (1992) notes, insist on meaning and are wrought in patterns of various degrees of mutability over time and space. These patterns are consistent across our physical bodies, bodiliness and embodiment, feelings and sensations, memory, imagination, expectations and thoughts and the rest of the world we inhabit. Having this in mind, I would like to address one of the most often voiced criticisms of phenomenology, namely its alleged solipsism and inability to address the social. Merleau-Ponty's concepts of 'flesh' and reversibility discussed in the first section of this article are good examples of how phenomenology can think other subjectivities and their interactions. Here I would like to point out that contrary to general opinion, the work of Edmund Husserl also showed great concern for the intersubjective (Duranti 2010; Zahavi 2003). For Husserl, as Zahavi points out, intersubjectivity is part of intentionality, which means that the subjective and intersubjective are "complementary and mutually interdependent notions" (2003: 118, 123). Duranti further explains how, for Husserl, intersubjectivity is "a kind of perspective-taking that is best characterized with metaphors such as 'trading places' rather than 'achieving understanding'" (2010: 14). Husserl made it clear that experience of the other is not some kind analogical inference but an experience of its own accord that could be phenomenologically analyzed (Zahavi 2003: 113). This, as we have seen before is completely in line with current neurological understandings of empathy.

Another common criticism that I myself personally relate to, especially when I first started reading phenomenological texts, is that phenomenological language can be excruciatingly opaque and it takes quite

an effort to start thinking in terms of being-in-the-world and other such 'dashing' concepts. However, this kind of aura of impenetrability seems to be a feature of all academic disciplines that try to shift thought to different ontological grounds, such as quantum physics that is based on the theory of relativity. Phenomenological thinking is unfortunately counterintuitive precisely because it attempts to describe reality in terms that cut across dualities imposed by our 'natural attitudes'. A frequent consequence of this is that some phenomenological observations, like Merleau-Ponty's intertwining, may sound much like pointing out the obvious. Perceptivity and perceptability may resemble the discovery of the active and passive voice in language. But while this indeed does not sound like much of a discovery, it certainly was for the first grammarians. In the same sense, the sentient and the sensible as two "quantum" states of our being-in-the-world between which we oscillate may well be the basic existential grammar that extends from language through the preobjective. Taken as such, Merleau-Ponty's reversibility thesis is indeed a profoundly intriguing proposition that contributes to probability, indeterminacy and dynamism in theoretical conceptualisations that generally tend to be static.

Evans-Pritchard (1965) conceptualized the main task of cultural anthropology as the translation of cultures. While postmodern anthropological writings brought the issues of power involved in this translation to the surface, the next step in this endeavour was to draw attention to the awareness of the body as the site, or methodological field, of this translation. What this meant in practice, as many phenomenologically inclined anthropologists have demonstrated, was a heightened attention to the bodiliness of our informants and ourselves as researchers. The body is one of the few human universalities that we can be sure of. Although we may never uncover the details of "pre-Babylonian" language, or start to use a single world language, we will always have a body as "lingua franca". As Farquhar and Lock have noted, our common carnality makes us all "primitives" at the level of embodiment (2007: 14). One can learn a foreign language without ever hearing any discourse about it, just by being plunged into the living reality of another culture. In this way, the process of translation is a process of creating a different kind of dictionary, a dictionary that complements our reflexivity, dialogism, 'thick descriptions', nomothetical endeavours and methodology with reflections on how other

people use and experience their bodies. This in practice means paying closer attention to bodiliness in the lifeworlds of the people we study when they engage with their environment, with other people, or when they just talk to us. However, as many phenomenologically minded anthropologists have noted, this also means reflecting upon our own states of embodiment when we engage with our ethnographic ‘others’ or when we are just observing them. It is only through practising such sensibility that we can uncover regularities that govern a particular domain of our cultural being-in-the-world as grounded in the body. Consequently, such an endeavour provides a more informed account of cultural experience extending beyond the constraints of the textual.

Besides attention to the body and bodiliness there is another sensibility that ‘culture as lifeworld’ paradigm brought to anthropology, - the emphasis on participation, on apprenticeship and “radical empiricism” (Jackson 1989: 3; Stoller 1989: 151). Such methodological imperative directs the anthropological gaze to the ethnographer’s body as well. It calls for using it as an instrument to “sample the experience” of culture. Phenomenology, as a practice of bracketing – of suspending natural attitude when faced with the alienating otherness of an other culture or “ethnographic epoche” – is something that the anthropologist cannot avoid doing, however prejudiced she or he is toward phenomenology as a form of Western academic being-in-the-world (Bidney 1973: 137; Throop 2012: 84). Furthermore, such a methodological understanding of phenomenology as the study of what ‘appears’ interfaces much easier with other non-Western phenomenologies, other ways of attending to what appears to consciousness (Halliburton 2002).

By developing models of reality based on observation of the ways in which people use their bodies provides us with ‘models *of*’ reality that are more informed than ‘models *for*’ reality. As such, these models produce effects that are in concordance with a perspective on social reality as embodied negotiation of our existence with issues of power. These models do not portray a reality in which people are victimized by power; where everything seems untrue and where everything can be deconstructed, only to be controlled again. It is understandable how the ‘power from nowhere’ favoured by constructivist approaches engenders a hovering

controller in a discourse, which is why it is particularly interesting to forms of government. However, applying phenomenology as a methodology does not mean replacing but complementing (Desjarlais & Throop 2011; Desjarlais 2012). A good analogy here is architectural planning. In order to build a paved path across a patch of land so that people do not have to walk through mud and grass, an architect will not just apply rules of urban planning and architectural design. She or he will also need to have an idea of how this patch of land is already used by people and how the space will be used in the future. Such observations should play a role in designing the best direction of the path. Otherwise, the space may end up with many shortcuts across a well-designed walk. We can understand the contribution that phenomenology offers to society in general in a similar way. Phenomenology argues for the coexistence and cooperation of essentialism and relativism, which means that attending to ‘things as they appear’ is not necessarily a replacement but always a useful supplement to whatever discursive action we take.

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Hrvoje Čargonja

ŽIVA TIJELA I SVJETOVI:  
PREGLED FENOMENOLOGIJE U ANTROPOLOGIJI

Članak započinje kratkim uvodom u fenomenologiju s posebnim fokusom na djelo Maurice Merleau-Pontyja čije su ideje imale snažan utjecaj na razvoj kulturne antropologije nakon 1980-ih, posebice kroz pojmove kao što su *otjelovljenje* i *radikalni empiricizam*. Članak nastavlja s pregledom glavnih pravaca u fenomenološkoj antropologiji kao i njezinim prekursorima. Naredna poglavlja posvećena su istaknutim temama u antropologiji koje su povezane s fenomenologijom, kao što su: ograđivanje (*bracketing*), međubivanje (*betweeness*), dualizam uma i tijela te otjelovljenje (*embodiment*). Zajedno sa sažetkom doprinosa fenomenologije antropologiji, članak završava pregledom nekih od uobičajenih kritika upućenih fenomenologiji.

**Ključne riječi:** fenomenologija, antropologija, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, otjelovljenje, dualizam uma i tijela